



The CAMA Connection

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LINKING MUNICIPAL PARTNERS – PROMOTING LITERACY AND LEARNING



CAMA
Literacy Project
Since 1993

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Getting Started with Workplace Learning

What do you need to get a workplace learning program started? *Definitely* a champion and support from management. *Essential* to have cooperation between the employer and the union. *Wonderful* to have links with community literacy programs and resources. But perhaps the most important things are – **patience and perseverance!**

This issue of The CAMA Connection highlights the experience of three municipalities in getting their workplace learning programs underway.

The City of **Bathurst, NB** began planning its workplace program in 1998. It was one of CAMA's first pilot projects. Seven years later, the project has evolved into a multi-faceted program offering a wide range of courses presented by the employees themselves.

The City of **Kingston, ON** hosted the CAMA *Literate Cities* conference in November 2002. It took more than two and a half years before the Joint Employee Education and Development Committee had its first meeting. Now they are moving right along with their planning and needs assessment.

The City of **Grande Prairie, AB** hosted a *Bridges to the Future* regional workshop in June 2005 and is just getting started on a workplace learning program. We interviewed City Manager, **Dave Gourlay**, about Grande Prairie's experience.

Read what each of these municipalities has to say about getting a workplace learning program started.

Find out what participants in CAMA's recent *Bridges to the Future* workshops had to say about barriers to starting a program and strategies to manage them.

Bathurst, NB

Jamie DeGrace
Human Resources Officer, HR Department

Initiating a Workplace Education Program: Try, Try Again . . .

The City of Bathurst Workplace Education Center began in the summer of 1998, when Mr. Tracy Branch, Director of Human Resources, was successful in obtaining provincial government funding. The City Manager and Council approved the program and a facilitator was hired.

Although all the steps to creating and implementing the program were positive and funding was in place, something was wrong. No one in the corporation really understood what the program was about. Low enrollment and lack of support brought things to a halt, resulting in a review of the whole process.

Rather than shelve a project that could have such a positive impact, Mr. Branch tried a new approach. He enlisted the help of Patricia Nutter (CAMA) and Literacy New Brunswick to develop the following six-step plan of action:

1. **Obtain corporate support and endorsement.** All the players – employees, unions, supervisors and management, as well as the Mayor and Council – had to be involved. It took a lot of meetings but was vital to the success of the program.

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2. **Make the program a joint initiative of Labour and Management.** Meetings were first held with the executive of each union local to find out what they specifically wanted in a program. Next, meetings were held with the executives of all the locals together to identify what was required for employees across all departments.
3. **Ask the unions to present the concept to their membership.** Letters were sent to all employees seeking their input and support.
4. **Gain support of department heads, supervisors and managers.** Human Resources met with each department to outline the program and get feedback and suggestions.
5. **Seek support of the Mayor and Council through an information meeting.** Council support was granted immediately and a resolution in favour of the program was adopted unanimously at the Council's next public meeting.
6. **Form a Workplace Education Committee to implement the program.** The Committee included representatives from each union local, from management (including HR), and the Workplace Education Facilitator.

Once the support structure was in place, a Needs Assessment was initiated. This crucial step had been overlooked in developing the initial program. A consultant was hired to interview employees and identify what courses were required.

The interview results were tabulated and focus groups were formed to identify specific course content and scheduling issues particular to each employee group. An offshoot of the Needs Assessment was the development of an Employee Talent Pool. Employees identified workshops they were willing to host, based on their interests and expertise.

The program remains active today by virtue of its adaptability. When the new City Hall Pavilion was constructed following the 2003 Canada Winter Games, a Workplace Education Center was incorporated into the Human Resources Department. Shortly afterwards, however, funding for the Workplace Education Facilitator was abolished. The City had to be very creative to keep the program operating. When a position opened in the Human Resources Department, the job description was modified to include the duties of the Workplace Education Facilitator. This necessitated some changes to the program but it continued to operate.

Fifty-six (56) different workshops have been presented over the years, ranging from introductory computer courses, reading and letter writing to vehicle maintenance, oil painting and dealing with conflict. The City of Bathurst measures program success not by enrollment but by what the learners are achieving.

Kingston, ON

Debbie LaVallee
 Manager, Employee Relations and Development, HR

Champions for Workplace Learning – Commitment and Continuity

Hosting the CAMA *Literate Cities* conference in November 2002 sparked the City of Kingston's interest in workplace education. Following up on the conference, Bill Bishop (Director of HR) and Debbie LaVallee (Manager, Employee Relations and Development) proposed to the City's senior management in December 2003 that a workplace education component be developed in cooperation with CUPE and integrated into the Corporate Employee Education and Development program. However, a decision on this proposal was deferred.

Michelle O'Brien, Chair of the CAMA Literacy Project Steering Committee, leads a CAMA workshop.





In 2004, CAMA's Patricia Nutter requested that Kingston host a pilot workshop for labour and management participants from Cornwall, Peterborough, Belleville and Kingston. This workshop raised awareness about municipal workplace learning and provided management and labour with suggestions for planning a workplace learning project. Key union and management representatives from the City of Kingston were convinced that they needed a joint labour-management committee. They drafted guiding principles, goals and terms of reference for a joint committee.

Bill Bishop and Debbie LaVallee took the idea back to senior management but once again, conditions were not right for the proposal to go forward. It was deferred until 2005.

The idea did not die, however. The focus of the initiative and the name were changed – it was clearly going to be a 'joint' project, headed by the Joint Employee Education and Development (JEED) committee. The group identified and clearly communicated the benefits of a collaborative approach – greater buy-in from stakeholders, better results, broader communication, a broader knowledge base and improved labour and employee relations.

Bill and Debbie also made sure that establishing the Joint Employee Education and Development Committee (JEED) was included in the HR Goals for 2005. Once the HR goals were approved, the committee was formed. It includes 4 management reps, 4 union reps and several reps from HR who deliver training courses. Several committee members have been involved since the first conference in 2002 and their participation provides valuable continuity for the process.

The JEED Committee has now finalized the principles, goals and terms of reference for the project. A sub-committee is overseeing the Needs Assessment and

developing a communications plan. The goal is to offer a pilot program before the end of this year and incorporate results in the 2006 corporate training budget.

Lessons they have learned to date:

- It's important to demonstrate the return on investment for a training program or any new proposal.
- The workplace is always a very busy and hectic place. Taking on a new project over and above regular work is often seen as creating more stress and problems. It takes time and patience to convey the benefits and convince those who can affect change.
- The process demonstrates how management and union working together can be effective and produce worthwhile results.

Obstacles identified:

- Resistance to change.
- There is a strong feeling that a training program means staff replacement and staff shortages; managers would have to find a way to cover workload or else work would be left undone.

Grande Prairie, AB

Dave Gourlay, City Manager

*Grande Prairie hosted one of the Bridges to the Future regional workshops in June 2005. Dave Gourlay, the City Manager, was instrumental in contacting CAMA for the workshop and getting Grande Prairie started on workplace learning. **The CAMA Connection** asked Mr. Gourlay to comment on starting this project.*

What was your initial motivation for wanting a workplace learning program?

When I heard the compelling stories of individuals who benefited from other CAMA workplace learning projects, I was able to identify similarities between their experience and my observations of the Grande Prairie workforce. The City's succession planning project has identified workplace learning and a commitment to life long learning as important strategies to make our staff ready for challenges such as a new position or increased demands within the employee's current job. As the City Manager, I knew that learning challenges were present in our organization. However I had had a difficult time finding a vehicle to address them. The literacy project offered a solution that seemed both practical and adaptable.

What has been the greatest success so far? What has been the biggest frustration?

We have been very fortunate in identifying a champion within our Human Resources area. Joyce Mearon has really been important in moving this project forward. The greatest success to date has been the commitment by CUPE local 787 and City staff to serve as the steering committee. The greatest frustration has been the challenge of getting the project established. Our staff are all very dedicated and fully committed. Finding the time for them to contribute to this project has been a hurdle.

How will the program be funded? Do you have internal resources to carry it out or will you work with an external group?

We believe the financial resources for the project are within the capacity of our current staff development fund. My belief that adequate funding is in place will be tested by the demand as the program grows and evolves. Since this program is new, some of these details are in their infancy, and I expect more clarity over time. These details aside, there is a strong commitment to the concept and the value of continuous learning, so in the near term, I do not expect funding will be a barrier. If the program exceeds my expectations for participation and produces a funding challenge, I would consider that an indicator of success.

Do you have a time goal for getting the project underway?

My personal goal is to see the project in place and available to staff in 2006. My other goal is to have at least one success story we can celebrate with the steering committee and staff involved in the project.

Report on *Bridges to the Future* Workshops Fort Erie, ON and Grande Prairie, AB

The *Bridges to the Future* workshops brought together municipal managers, union representatives and representatives from the literacy movement to talk about municipal workplace learning programs. Some people wanted to know more about these programs – their benefits and challenges. Some wanted to know how to get started or how to move their program along. Others wanted to find out what resources were available to help them.

Workshop sessions focused on:

- the importance of the employer and union working together to plan a workplace learning program;
- steps for planning a workplace learning program;
- challenges and barriers and how to manage them;
- developing an action plan for each municipality.

Participants indicated that they learned a lot from the workshops. They especially appreciated the opportunity to share experiences and hear what other municipalities were doing. Developing the action plans was identified as an extremely useful activity.

If you would like to read the full conference report, *A Tale of Two Workshops*, go to the CAMA Web site - www.camacam.ca/programs_publications.asp

If you are interested in organizing a workshop in your area, contact Patricia Nutter at pnutter@lincsac.com or call 613-264-0111.

Coming Events

Do you know of conferences, workshops or other events that would be interesting for your CAMA colleagues? If so, please send them to – pnutter@lincsac.com

Coming in Spring 2006

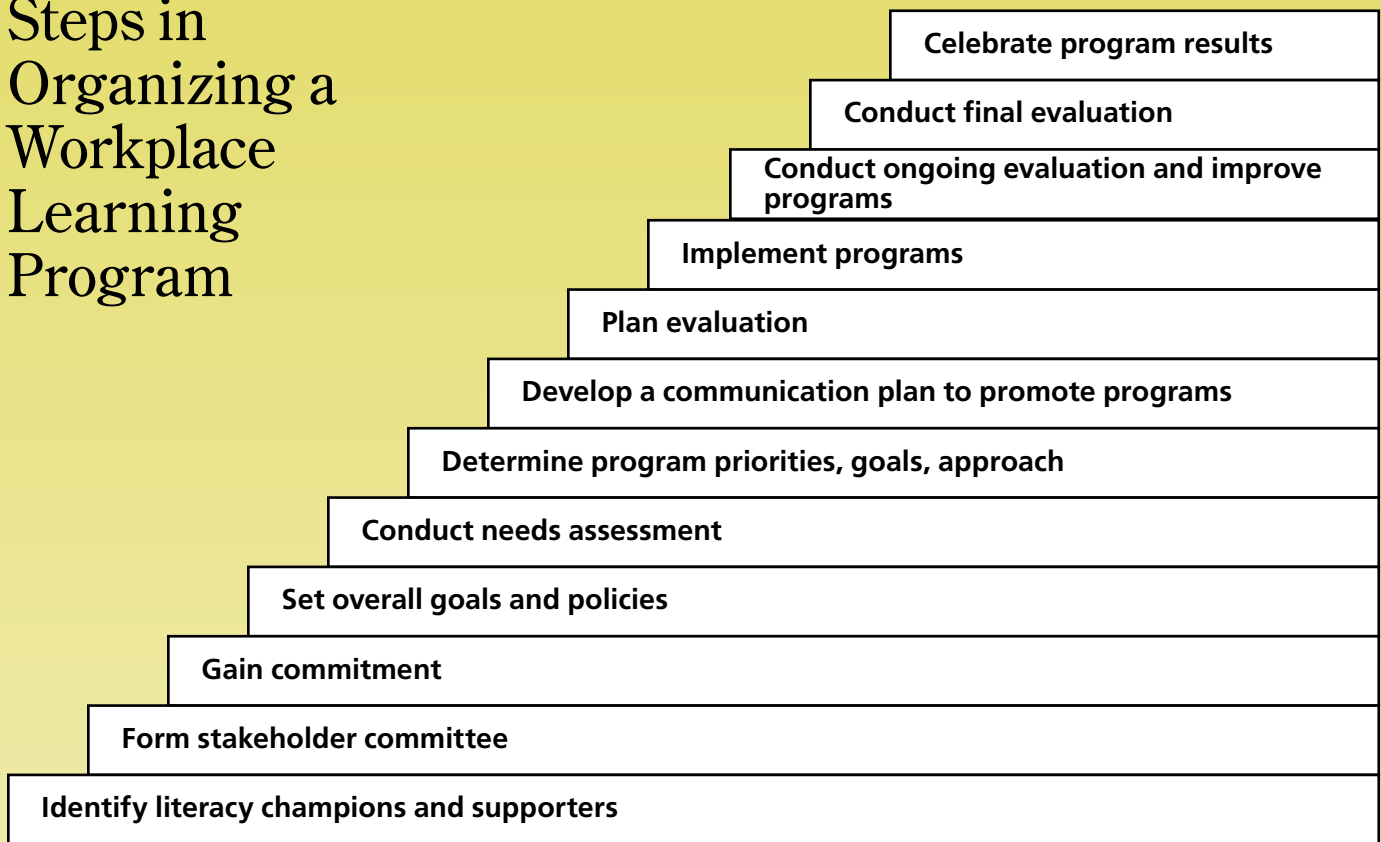
CAMA Literacy Project Forum in cooperation with the Ontario Literacy Coalition. See the spring edition for more information.

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Steps in Organizing a Workplace Learning Program



From *A Tale of Two Workshops*, prepared by Sue Folinsbee for CAMA, August 2005

Resources to Help You Start a Workplace Learning Program

CAMA publications available free at: www.camacam.ca/programs_publications.asp

- *Blueprint for a Learning Community – A Guide for the Municipal Stakeholder*
- *A Guide for Planning and Conducting an Organizational Needs Assessment for Municipal Literacy Programs*

Conference Board of Canada publications available free at: www.conferenceboard.ca/education/reports

- *Success by Design – What Works in Workforce Development* (2002) – outlines the benefits of workplace education programs organized jointly by employers and unions; provides information on key elements for success; provides advice on planning and getting started.
- *Workplace Literacy Best Practices Reader* (1998) – profiles 26 good examples of private sector workplace literacy programs, including Conference Board award winners.

Barriers to Setting Up a Workplace Learning Program and Suggestions to Deal with Them

From participants in the *Bridges to the Future* workshops, June 2005

Lack of Funding

- Pool tuition money available for individuals and use it to run a workplace program.
- Negotiate money for the program through collective bargaining.
- Canvass supportive councillors to get their commitment to funding.
- Work with CAMA, municipal unions or local literacy programs.

Fear of getting involved or being seen negatively by management

- Provide education and awareness about the benefits of learning to all stakeholders.
- Ensure that management endorses the program.
- Ensure the program is confidential.
- Provide one on one tutoring for those who need it.
- First group going through will be the champions and mentors for others.

Time, shift work and family demands

- Offer courses in and around shifts; have multiple offerings to accommodate shifts.
- Find out what time frames would work through an Organizational Needs Assessment.
- Offer financially supported childcare.
- Offer programs 50% on work time and 50% on people's own time.

Lack of awareness about the issue

- Develop a communication plan to let everyone know what is happening.
- Conduct a needs assessment to create awareness.
- Show what has worked in other municipalities.

Workload

- Make the program a priority.
- Make the program voluntary.

Lack of vision or commitment

- Develop understanding between management and labour.
- Show what has worked in other municipalities.

Do you have suggestions about how to deal with these barriers or others your municipality has encountered? Share them with your colleagues – send to pnutter@lincsat.com